

Safeguarding land for future generations – how German development cooperation contributes

The challenge

Land degradation is a global threat! Between 20 and 40% of the global land area has already degraded according to estimates – with immense negative impacts on soil quality, vegetation, water resources, and biodiversity. Human activities, often related to unsustainable agricultural practices, are the main drivers of land degradation: the overuse and contamination of soil and groundwater, deforestation, overgrazing. Climate change and population growth are leading to a greater demand on land, further aggravating the loss. Not only does land degradation affect land-based ecosystem services such as the storage of soil organic carbon, but it also poses a threat to the livelihoods of rural communities, translating into economic damage, food insecurity and vulnerability for land users as well as society as a whole. The respective costs of land degradation are estimated to be between 6.3 and 10.6 trillion USD annually, an amount equal to 7% to 13% of global GDP.

UNCCD and Land Degradation Neutrality

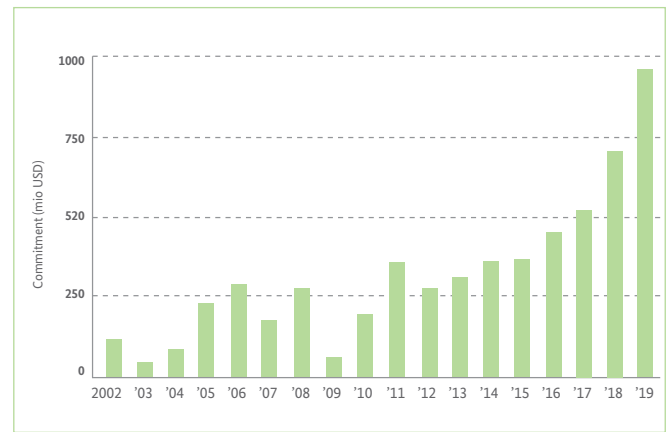
A global issue, land degradation requires a global response. In 1994, the United Nations established the Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) as the “sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management.” It serves as a framework for addressing desertification, land degradation, and drought in an internationally coordinated manner.

The goal is to protect land to ensure the sustainability of the planet and well-being and prosperity for future generations. Since 2015, UNCCD has been closely linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 15.3 on Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN). Achieving LDN is the main goal of UNCCD, which aims to reach a balance of no net land loss by 2030. Within the framework of the convention, countries worldwide have defined national LDN targets in order to avoid, reduce, and reverse land degradation. At the same time, LDN is recognized as a contributor to a multitude of other SDGs (as shown on the right).

German support in implementing the UNCCD

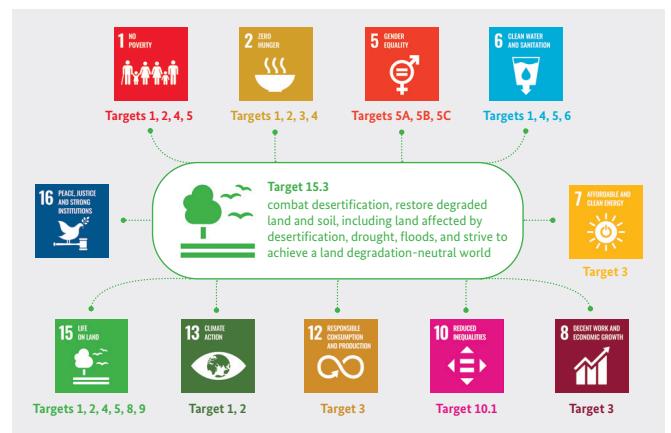
Germany supports partner countries worldwide in the implementation of the Convention and is host to the UNCCD Secretariat in Bonn. In addition, Germany invested more than 1 billion USD in 2019 in combating land degradation, desertification and drought. Over the last decade, Germany therefore has been one of the largest contributors to the funding of the Convention process.

Annual German bilateral commitment to combat desertification



Source: OECD database, 2022

Land as the engine for sustainable development



Source: Operational Guidance for Country Support, UNCCD 2019



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Combating desertification through multiple approaches

Land degradation is a complex issue; achieving Land Degradation Neutrality thus requires multifaceted solutions. Approaches such as Sustainable Land Management (SLM) and land restoration are necessary, as is ensuring an enabling environment for the implementation of such concepts. The success of these approaches lies in choosing a multilevel approach which includes international processes, national policy consulting and local implementation. Germany supports several projects and initiatives that apply these strategies in their support of the implementation of the UNCCD. Some of the most important projects include:

Economics of Land Degradation



The Economics of Land Degradation (ELD) Initiative highlights the costs of degraded land and the value of healthy land and its ecosystem services.

As a multidisciplinary science-policy partnership, ELD supports policy action with scientific evidence, cost-benefit analyses and development scenarios. These demonstrate that investments in sustainable land management, conservation and restoration pay off. They also provide scenarios that reflect land dynamics under the influence of anthropogenic processes.

Group on Earth Observations



The Group on Earth Observations Land Degradation Neutrality (GEO-LDN) Initiative

was founded to support countries in their efforts to achieve LDN by 2030. Its goal is to provide easy access to earth observation tools and datasets and facilitate knowledge transfer on their implementation. This is done through capacity development and dialogue forums for data providers, policymakers and land users. In doing so, the initiative allows countries to effectively track their LDN progress and to apply targeted and evidence-based interventions for SLM.

Global Project ProSoil: Soil protection and rehabilitation for food security



With the global programme “Soil Protection and Rehabilitation for Food Security”

(ProSoil), launched in 2014, Germany fosters different approaches that promote soil protection and rehabilitation for sustainable land management. ProSoil works in six African countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Tunisia) as well as India, supporting partners in integrating soil protection and rehabilitation in their agendas, political strategies and agricultural advisory services. The overall budget of ProSoil amounts to 205 million Euros. From June 2021, ProSoil has been co-funded by the European Union (EU) with the aim of promoting agroecological transition. Co-funding is also provided by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation so as to strengthen soil data and science for support in decision-making. Since its inception, the programme has protected or rehabilitated 500,000 hectares of land; farmers' yields on this land have increased by 40 per cent on average.

Global Soil Week



The adoption of SLM techniques needs a conducive institutional setting. Achieving LDN is thus not only a technical but also a policy challenge. Among other financial, institutional and regulatory requirements, secured land tenure is crucial. With improved land tenure security, land users are more likely to invest in SLM. BMZ, GIZ and TMG research founded the Global Soil Week (GSW) as a platform and process to connect a diverse range of actors as well as to initiate and strengthen policies and actions on SLM and responsible land governance. Together with civil society and partner countries, the GSW currently focusses on monitoring land rights in LDN contexts to contribute to the implementation of the UNCCD landmark decision on land tenure.

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